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Young people's views of the outcomes of non-formal education in youth organisations: its effects on human, social and psychological capital, employability and employment

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Abstract: This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role of youth organisations in enhancing the employability of young people through the development of different forms of capital: human, social and psychological. Instead of asking questions about who access extra-curricular activities that may provide young people with positional advantages in the labour market and the class biases that arise in access, the article explores whether the benefits obtained from participation vary by socio-economic background. We make use of the Youth organisations and employability (YOE) database, which contains data from over 1000 young people in more than 40 European countries on the effects of involvement in youth organisations on different forms of capital: human, social and psychological. We find positive effects of involvement on all three forms of capital. The analysis suggests that the characteristics of the involvement in youth organisations are better predictors of its outcomes than are personal characteristics, and find no significant effects of socio-economic background on the reported benefits of participation in our sample. Policy implications are derived from these findings, calling for greater policy support to increase opportunities for the involvement of young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds in youth organisations and for better informing young people of the benefits of sustained involvement with youth organisations.

1. Introduction: young people, youth organisations and employability in Europe

This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role of youth organisations in enhancing the employability of young people. Specifically, it explores the degree to which young people identify involvement in youth organisations as a contributor to the development of three different forms of capital that are relevant for employability: human, social and psychological capital, and how that varies for different groups of young people. Second, the article explores self-reported effects on actual employment outcomes. Young people's labour market integration is a strong concern in Europe (European Commission 2010). The devastating effects of the economic crisis on young people, resulting in the lowest ever youth employment rate in the European Union (EFILWC 2012), have made young people's employability an even more pressing issue. Over 10% of young people 15–24 in Europe are neither in employment, nor in education or training, at an estimated loss of over 100 billion Euros per year, including foregone earnings and excess transfers (Eurofound 2012). Lack of connection with the labour market also has implications for social inclusion, as employment shapes individuals' relational dynamics, social participation and social integration (Room 1995). The importance of involvement in youth organisations is often ignored in mainstream employability studies (Adams 2007; ILO 2009). Individual development of skills, social capital and psychological capital development cannot tackle the current youth unemployment problem by themselves, but may be important elements of the 'employability mix' of individuals.

The article makes contributions on two fronts. First, empirically, it provides an overview of perceptions, based on the analysis of a European-wide survey dataset (N = 1076), regarding the increase in three different 'capitals' derived from involvement in youth organisations. This analysis is currently lacking in the literature, and links to wider discussions on the role of non-formal education in employment-relevant skills development (Giroux 2005); and on the new strategies that young people adopt to differentiate them-selves in the labour market, after decades of educational expansion (Ball 2003). Second, the article contributes to the theoretical literatures on social reproduction by analysing the extent to which the development of different forms of capital derived from involvement in youth organisations varies by socio-economic background.

The term 'youth organisation' is used in this article in a broad sense, to refer to a wide set of social organisations (associations, clubs or movements) that are set up to serve young people and where young people are in charge of the operational structure, of making decisions on the focus of the organisations' activities and their organisational strategies (Souto-Otero et al. 2013). These organisations tend to be providers of some kind of non-formal education on the basis of recreational, political or social activities. They can be formed around a broad range of topics, may run through neighbourhoods, schools or sports, playground, political or religious associations – amongst others – and may operate at local, national or international level. Examples of youth organisations include students' organisations, scouts and youth clubs.

In the literature review section of the article we make reference to 'youth work', whose effects on skills development have been explored in the literature. Youth work is varied (Cooper 2012), it cannot always be straightforwardly differentiated from related activities (Dunne et al. 2014) and its definition is complex (Dickson, Vigurs, and Newman 2013). However, it is broadly agreed that it refers to a support activity for the personal, social and political development of older children and young adults, through their voluntary involvement. Jeffs and Smith (2010) underline five characteristics of youth work: it focuses on the needs and experiences of young people – rather than follow standardised processes and curricula – participation is voluntary; it fosters association, relationship and community encouraging all to join, organise and take part in activities; it provides a friendly, accessible and responsible

environment; and it looks at the education and welfare of young people. Youth work, thus, is a relational activity where the youth worker and the young person establish a two-way dialogue that is central to the often experiential and collective – learning process (Ord 2009). Youth work can take place in various contexts and settings (hospitals, libraries, community venues, recreational sites, etc.), wherever young people may be (detached or outreach youth work – Dickson, Vigurs, and Newman 2013; Dunne et al. 2014), but youth organisations are a central setting for youth work (Coussée 2008; Dunne et al. 2014), and both terms are, thus, closely related.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: section two takes stock of relevant literature on skills development and employability enhancement through involvement in youth organisation; section three explains the data and methods used for the analysis; section four presents the findings and section five the study's conclusions.

2. Young people, youth organisations and employability

2.1. The focus: human, social and psychological capital

'Soft skills' such as communication, organisational skills or leadership are an important part of human capital (Heckman 2000) and are highly demanded in the labour market (Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011). They are the kind of skills that are more likely to be developed in non-formal education in youth organisations (Miles 2007).

Vincent and Ball (2007) report that the extra-curricular activities in which middle class parents involve their children are not necessarily closely connected to formal learning, but enhance the acquisition of cultural skills, communication, confidence and the multicultural capital that allows their children to be streetwise, globally knowledgeable, tolerant, inclusive. Stuber (2009) argues that participation in extra-curricular activities in college is similarly class-biased, and is an important setting for stratification, because there students gain access to social and cultural resources valued by the privileged classes. These studies, however, do not explore in much detail class differences in the outputs of participation – as opposed to social class differences in participation.

The analysis of the development of social capital (Putnam 2000) focuses on the establishment of contacts that generate entitlements and 'credit' through connections, and the acquisition of information that inheres social exchanges. While much sociological analysis underlines the importance of family background in determining the social capital young people have, extant analyses have tended to play down young people's agency and decision-making in the generation of their social capital. Recent literature has nevertheless shown that young people can play an active role in the development of their own social capital (Helve and Bynner 2007). Participation in youth organisations could indeed lead to the development of connections between individuals from different economic, ethnic and/or social backgrounds, which foster access to information and social resources, related to employment.

Finally, in their analysis of psychological capital Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) define resilience – one of its central components – as the capacity of individuals to bounce back and even beyond when beset by problems and adversity to obtain their objectives. This definition has been extended by other authors who associate resilience with acceptance of change and diversity (Malone 2008). Resilient individuals can, then, better adapt to unfavourable labour market environments, following strategies such as the broadening of the range of employment opportunities they would consider taking-up or the locations where they would accept employment.

While the concepts of human, social and psychological capital capture different properties (Burt 1998) and they are analytically useful separate constructs, their boundaries are not always as clear-cut. Coleman (1988) already reflected on the importance of social capital in

the family and the school for the creation of human capital. The relationship between 'soft skills', psychological capital and resilience is also evident (Malone 2008). Soft skills include items such as 'self-confidence', which can be modified through learning and is not an enduring property of the individual – thus a skill 'proper' (Heckman and Rubinstein 2001) – but also a component of psychological capital (Stajkovic and Luthans 1998).

2.2. The development of different forms of capital through participation in youth organisations

There is a long tradition of research on the effects of participation in extra-curricular activities and youth organisations on aspects such as political socialisation (Smith 1999). There are fewer studies that focus on the development of different forms of capital through involvement in youth organisations. Quantitative studies on how young people perceive the effects of involvement in youth organisations on their capital endowments or their employability are even scarcer. Most of the literature relies on anecdotal evidence (Roulin and Bangerter 2013).

Studies have focused on the relationship between youth work and skills development tend to indicate the range of skills that may be developed through involvement in youth organisations, rather than assess the extent to which these are developed. Giroux analyses what he calls youth work as a 'border pedagogy' (Giroux 2005, 20), which provides young people with greater capacity to be active critical citizens, whereas Harland and Morgan (2010) refer to the fact that youth work encompasses a range of skills not well covered in the school curriculum, without providing testimony as to the specific skills developed. Wood (2009) goes one step further to suggest that some of the benefits of being involved with youth projects concern the development of 'soft skills' such as confidence and self-esteem and leadership, and the development of networks and contacts. Coburn (2011) points out the impact of youth work on improving the problem solving skills of young people, Mallon (2008) on enhancing social skills, and Mowat (2008) on critical thinking.

In one of the few studies that tries to quantify the development of skills through youth related work, Furlong et al. (1997) report that youth organisations provide the opportunity to develop personal and social skills, team-work and self-confidence through non-formal education. They find that more than half of participants in the youth clubs and sports clubs they studied felt that such participation had 'helped them a lot' in acquiring new skills and around a quarter reported that it had 'helped them a lot' to arrive at decisions. However, their study was restricted to vulnerable young people only. Other studies, such as Broad-bent and Papadopoulos (2010) provide quantitative information on the skills developed during youth activities but refer to flexible school-based programmes, not to youth activities that may be planned and occur at a distance from formal education environments. Thus, further analysis of the claim made through case-study work on the relationship between participation in youth organisations and skills development is urgently required.

The literature on the development of employment-relevant social and psychological capital through involvement in youth organisations is scarcer than the literature on the development of human capital. Social capital is a useful resource for youth in their transit to adulthood (college, jobs and other institutions), because interaction with other individuals or groups provides resources to which individuals would not otherwise have access (Portes 1998). Some studies have looked at the decline in social capital amongst the youth population (Rahn and Transue 1998) and others have examined the development of social capital within family and educational structures (Lareau 1989). A number of studies have also researched the ways in which youth related activities can result in the development of social capital for young people, often with positive conclusions on the association between social capital and youth

activities (Jarret, Sullivan, and Watkins 2005; Coburn 2011). Regarding psychological capital, extant literature, while limited, also points to connections between out of school activities, non-formal education and the development of independence, psychological capital and resilience (Kearns 2005). This literature suggests, based on project-based evaluations, that non-formal education can help individuals to become more resilient, better manage changes in their environment and influence their future (Malone 2008). Extant literature has, however, neglected the study of how the outcomes of participation in youth organisations in terms of social and psychological capital development may differ for individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds and other individual characteristics and thus how it may relate to social reproduction.

2.3. Exploring variations in skills development: individual characteristics and type of participation

Given the scarcity of research that explores the results of participation in youth organisations in the development of different forms of capital, it is not wholly surprising that there is very little information on how individual characteristics are associated with the production of those outputs. While the literature reports that people from higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to participate more often in youth organisations, we remain uninformed regarding the perceptions of benefit from individuals from different backgrounds, once they have been involved with youth organisations. Individual characteristics such as age, gender, socio-economic background, education, and occupational status, and the nature of the participation in youth organisations, such as intensity of participation and participation in youth organisations abroad, could be expected to affect the outcomes produced by engagement in youth organisations.

Regarding age, social psychologists and sociologists tend to hold the view that soft skills and emotional intelligence can be learned at any age (see Boyatzis 2008). On the other hand, economists (Carneiro and Heckman 2003; Brunello and Schlotter 2011) have argued that the soft skills and non-cognitive abilities which can facilitate the acquisition of social capital and psychological capital analysed in this article, may be well set as early as age 8 and are more malleable until the end of the teenage years. There is some evidence that young people are becoming more instrumental in their involvement with the voluntary sector (Barker 1993) and formal education. Assuming the same applies in relation to their involvement with youth organisations, it could be expected that younger people exploit the opportunities for skills and employability development offered by these organisations to a higher extent. Glaeser, Laibson, and Sacerdote (2002) expect the stock of social capital to increase since birth to peak at middle age (40–50 years of age) to then decrease; this could suggest that younger people also have greater scope to increase their stock of social capital and report marked improvements on them whereas more mature people will have more established and less changing connections. On the whole, we expect age to have a negative relationship with the development of the three forms of capital in youth organisations.

Females are expected to benefit less from involvement in youth organisations, given that they have an edge in the development of non-cognitive skills (Jacob 2002) – so the scope for improvement is lower. We expect those with higher levels of education to be more aware of the potential employability benefits of participation in youth organisations (Roulin and Bangerter 2013) and more receptive to look out for information on new employment opportunities and mobility during their involvement in such organisations (Souto-Otero 2010). We thus hypothesise a positive relationship between level of education and the development of different forms of capital. Being employed is expected to be negatively related to the

development of human capital in youth organisations, given that those people in employment already have opportunities to enhance their soft skills through non-formal learning at work.

Being in employment is also expected to be negatively associated with social capital as those in employment can put their efforts in developing relevant bridging social capital in their job environments, and with psychological capital, as they have fewer incentives than those who do not yet have a job to broaden the occupations they would consider or the range of locations where they would be willing to take-up a job. Consistently with social reproduction theories' views, we expect socio-economic background to be positively associated with the outcome variables. Finally, the nature of participation in youth organisations is also expected to have an impact on the development of different forms of capital. As such, and building on previous research, more intensive involvement and involvement in youth organisations abroad are expected to be positively associated with the outcome variables (Thomas 2001).

2.4. The link to employability: does the development of soft skills through involvement in youth organisations count in the labour market?

The development of social and psychological capital can be expected to enhance the employability of individuals. Regarding the potential effect of skills development (human capital) in youth organisations on young people's employability, the question needs to be related to the legitimacy and credibility that employers give to the development of skills in those organisations. A rich literature on the use of biographical information in recruitment processes suggests that employers do value extra-curricular activities generally although the degree of value attached to them depends on certain conditions, like the number of experiences, their type and how they are presented. A key way in which youth related activities can affect positively the recruitment process is based on the idea that recruiters have implicit theories that associate certain experiences with certain skills sets. Brown and Campion (1994) report that recruiters associate participation in youth and community activities with the development of interpersonal skills and high motivation, which they associate, in turn, with high performance. As Chen, Huang, and Lee (2011) note, the effects of resume content on hiring recommendations are mediated by recruiters' perceptions of person-job fit and person-organisation fit. Participation in certain extra-curricular activities is interpreted as a signal of the personality of the young person (Tomlinson 2007). Moreover, applicants' life experiences may enhance recruiters' similar-to-me effects in relation to those applications, which would enhance the value that recruiters attach to them (Tsai et al. 2011). Cole et al. (2007) report that employers judge applicants with low academic qualifications but high amounts of work experience and extra-curricular activities as being highly employable. In fact, people performing highly in extra-curricular activities can be seen to have a specialist skill set. Within this overall pattern, the type of involvement in extra-curricular activities – for instance whether or not a leadership role has been taken-up – can have an effect on the value that employers attach to it.

2.5. Summary

This literature review has examined the extent to which involvement in youth organisations may enhance the employability of young people focusing on three literature strands: sociology of education, youth studies and human resources management. Several gaps have been identified in the literature. First, the sociological literature on extra-curricular activities has concentrated on differences in access to such activities by socio-economic background and has looked mainly at activities that are of a formalised nature – extra-curricular classes. It has, on the other hand, neglected the study of variations in the perceived results of such

participation for young people from different socio-economic backgrounds. This literature has also tended to play down young people's agency in the generation of their own social capital.

On the other hand, the literature on 'youth' looks at the degree to which participation in youth activities may be conducive to skills development, but provides little quantitative information on the extent to which human, social or psychological capital are developed in youth organisations and on differences by socio-economic background and other individual characteristics in those outcomes. The base upon which conclusions are drawn is, thus, thin and largely based on a single method: case-study work. Finally, the biographical information/human resources literature has established a link between participation in extra-curricular activities generally, skills development and employability. However, it has not looked at how this plays out in relation to youth organisations specifically. This article aims to address these gaps.

3. Research questions, data and methods

3.1. Research questions

The article addresses one main question, related to young people's perceptions of the extent to which they have developed their human, social and psychological capital through participation in youth organisations. A related question is how social background and other individual characteristics may affect differences in reported benefits across these different forms of capital. A final question is related to young people's perceptions of the influence of participation in youth organisations on their employment outcomes. As already explained, the elements upon which we focus in our outcome variables are: soft skills in relation to human capital (Heckman 2000), new connections that facilitate future action and cooperation for mutual benefit in relation to social capital (Putnam 2000) and 'resilience' in job search in terms of psychological capital (Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio 2007).

3.2. Data

The analysis makes use of a unique database (the 'Youth organisations and employability' YOE database)¹ containing data from 1076 young people (15–30) from over 40 European countries. Data were collected through an online survey, between May and June 2012. The survey was made available in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish. It consisted of 26 questions on personal background, the degree of involvement with youth organisations and the outcomes of such involvement. The survey adopted a non-probability sampling, and significance levels are reported in the results' section for information only. Data collection largely relied on youth organisations to distribute the survey. The survey was distributed among 40 national youth councils in European countries, over 50 international youth NGOs and over 200 youth organisations and National Agencies for European youth programmes, covering a wide spectrum of organisations working in the youth field. These organisations were requested to forward the survey to young people who participated in their activities or had been interested in taking part in their activities.

3.3. Methods and variable definition

The data on the outcomes of involvement in youth organisations were self-reported. This information is important because it is young people's own perceptions of development that will shape the narratives that they will present to, or omit from, in recruitment processes. The data analysis is based on descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression. Binary logistic regression was employed to explore the effect of socio-economic and other factors on the development of human, social and psychological capital. Binary logistic regression models

the result of a binary outcome in terms of a set of predictor variables. The article reports results as relative odds ratios for each category of each predictor variable compared with the odds ratios for the reference category identified. Odds ratios greater than 1 imply a positive relationship of the predictor with the outcome and odds ratios of less than 1 a negative relationship.

The 'human capital' variable divided individuals into two groups: those who reported high development of human capital and those who did not. The survey asked respondents to report on the degree to which they had improved 17 soft skills through their involvement in youth organisations. The selection of the set of soft skills included in the analysis was based on a recent review of the literature on the soft skills more often demanded by employers (Souto-Otero et al. 2013). Respondents reported their level of development of each of those skills through their involvement with youth organisations on a six points Likert scale from 0 (no improvement) to 5 (high improvement). The points given to each skill were then summed for each individual. A threshold was set at 70 points or above – equivalent to an average score of approximately 4 or above – for each of the 17 skills for which information was gathered. Individuals with a score above 70 points were coded as '1' (high skills development), the others as '0'. Definitions for these soft skills were not provided to respondents, but examples of how each soft skill may translate into practice were provided in one of the survey questions, which could contribute to generate a common understanding of each skill amongst individuals in our sample.

For the measurement of social capital a question on the 'establishment of contacts through involvement in youth organisations that had already helped respondents in employment matters' was used. Individuals were again divided into two groups: those who reported involvement in youth organisations had already helped them in employment matters and all those who reported it had not.

The variable on psychological capital was measured using a question related to three elements that are associated with the development of resilience. The question asked respondents: To what extent do you agree with the following statements: (1) My involvement with youth organisations has broaden the range of occupations/jobs I would consider in the future; (2) My involvement with youth organisations has broadened the range of geographical locations (cities/countries) where I would consider taking-up a job; (3) My involvement with youth organisations has motivated me to undertake greater/more intense job search. For each of these statements respondents were asked to express their level of agreement on a scale from 0 (do not agree) to 5 (fully agree). Individuals reporting a high level of agreement (score of 4 or 5) with all three statements were coded as '1'. Other respondents were coded as '0'.

Following the discussions provided in the literature review, four factors related to individual characteristics were included in the regression models (age, gender, education, socio-economic background and occupational status) and two factors related to the nature of the participation in youth organisations were also included (intensity of participation and participation in youth organisations abroad). A full description of the variables employed in the analysis is provided in [Appendix 1](#). Several interaction effects (between education, age, socio-economic background, gender and intensity of participation) were explored in alternative binary logistic regression models, but since these were not statistically significant for any of the dependent variables and did not improve the models, they are not reported.

4. Results

This section presents, first, the characteristics of the sample. It then presents descriptive results on the outcome variables: perceptions of human, social and psychological capital development. Third, it reviews the individual and participation factors that affect perceived

development of those forms of capital. Fourth, it examines perceptions on the actual employment outcomes of participation in youth organisations.

4.1. Characteristics of the sample

Table 1 reports on the characteristics of the sample. Most individuals in our sample were in the age group 20–24. Females were overrepresented (see also Kay and Bradbury 2009). There was a high representation of individuals with high levels of education. The majority of respondents (60%) reported to have received some form of higher education. For the age group 25–29 the percentage increases to 88%. This overrepresentation of highly educated individuals is typical of many youth and volunteering organisations (TNS 2011) but may also be due, at least partly, to the online nature of the YOE survey. Regarding the occupational status of respondents, multiple responses were possible. Most respondents were students, followed by those in employment.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sample.

	Count	Percent (%)
Age		
15–19	193	18
20–24	551	51
25–29	332	31
Gender		
Male	316	30
Female	756	70
Highest level of education		
Postgraduate studies	250	23
Higher education	397	37
General secondary education	346	32
Vocational secondary education	42	4
Primary education or lower	41	4
Socio-economic background		
Postgraduate studies	122	11
Higher education	538	50
General secondary education	197	18
Vocational secondary education	160	15
Primary education or lower	49	5
No answer	10	1
Occupation – multiple response possible		
Student	729	68
Internship/apprenticeship	92	9
In work	345	32
Unemployed	93	9
In between study periods	43	4
Other	45	4

Source: YOE survey.

Around half of the sample reported to be exclusively students and a fifth exclusively in employment. The remaining 30% reported to be undertaking an internship/ apprenticeship, unemployed, in between study periods or a combination of occupational statuses. While we acknowledge that the relationship between education, incomes and occupational status is not straightforward (Bukodi, Dex, and Goldthorpe 2011), taking highest level of education of parents as a proxy for socio-economic background suggests that the sample comes from privileged backgrounds. Over 60% of the sample has at least one parent who holds a higher education credential.

4.2. Human, social and psychological capital development in youth organisations

4.2.1. Human capital

Respondents reported substantial levels of improvement in their soft skills as a result of participation in youth organisations. Communication skills, adaptability and flexibility, team-working skills, intercultural skills and self-confidence ranked amongst those developed to a

greater extent. These skills are highly demanded by employers (Souto-Otero et al. 2013). The skills that respondents reported to have developed to a lower extent were IT skills, numeracy and literacy and foreign language skills, which tend to receive greater attention in formal curricula than soft skills (Table 2).

On the whole, around three quarters of individuals reported that they had developed all the skills for which data was collected at a level of 3 or above in the rank of 0–5. Only around one quarter of respondents reported to have developed some of these skills below a score of 3. Less than 2% reported that to have developed all these skills at a level below 3.

4.2.2. Social capital

Social capital questions in the YOE survey referred to the development of connections that young people expect to have value. The survey enquired how much involvement in youth organisations had helped respondents to acquire social capital that had been or could be of help in applications for jobs, internships/apprenticeships (Table 3). Multiple responses were possible, so the percentages reported do not add up to 100.

More than 80% of respondents reported that involvement in youth organisations had helped them develop social capital that had been useful to them or they expect to be useful in the future. Around two thirds reported that they had developed contacts that had been or they expect to be useful for employment matters (Table 3).

At the time of the survey, around a quarter of respondents (24%) had never applied for a job or internship/ apprenticeship, a fifth (19%) had applied for an internship/apprentice-ship, just over a quarter (27%) for a job and almost a third (30%) for both. When only those respondents who had applied for a job/internship and/or apprenticeship are considered – in order to discount what could be unrealistic expectations from those young people who had not submitted any applications – the main trends reported hold rather well. Around 60% of those respondents with experience in application processes reported that they had developed contacts that had been or they expect to be useful for employment matters. Involvement in youth organisations thus, was reported to have helped substantially those individuals in our sample to develop their social capital and useful social capital for employment purposes in particular.

Table 2. Participation in youth organisations and the development of human capital.

	Average	SD
Communication skills	4.07	1.09
Adaptability/flexibility	4.00	1.09
Team-working skills	3.96	1.39
Intercultural skills	3.90	1.39
Self-confidence	3.87	1.23
Organisational skills	3.75	1.27
Decision-making skills	3.74	1.21
Problem-solving skills	3.70	1.26
Career management skills	3.68	1.14
Leadership	3.65	1.41
Emotional intelligence	3.56	1.24
Integrity	3.56	1.31
Creativity	3.53	1.25
Entrepreneurship	3.49	1.28
Foreign language skills	3.28	1.63
Literacy and/or numeracy	2.50	1.56
IT skills	2.29	1.62

Source: YOE survey.

Table 3. Participation in youth organisations and social capital development.

Participation in youth organisation has enabled respondent to establish contacts that ...	Number of responses	Percentage
Have already helped in employment matters	209	19.42
Have made respondent aware of employment opportunities	377	35.04
Can help respondent in employment matters, but have not helped yet	364	33.83
Are useful, but not in finding employment	336	31.23
Are not useful	90	8.36
Do not know/no answer	70	6.51

Source: YOE survey.

4.2.3. Psychological capital

Table 4 reports on the degree to which involvement with youth organisations contributes to the development of psychological capital, and to the adoption of 'resilience' strategies in the context of a difficult labour market.

Table 4. Participation in youth organisations and the development of psychological capital – multiple response possible.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	No answer/Not applicable
Broadened range of occupations/jobs that would consider	5.15	4.87	7.35	11.93	24.24	33.02	13.45
Broadened range of locations where would consider taking-up job	10.18	6.76	6.37	11.51	16.27	35.01	13.89
Motivated to undertake more intense job search	12.34	5.65	7.56	14.74	17.42	22.68	19.62
Has not changed job plans/aspirations	35.08	13.59	9.79	9.89	7.51	10.08	14.07

Source: YOE survey. Key: 0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree.

A large percentage of respondents reported that participation had increased one or more of the characteristics that we associate with increased resilience in job search. Thus, more than two thirds of respondents agreed (score of 3 or higher), that participation in youth organisations broadened the range of occupations they would consider, over 60% that it broadened the range of locations where they would consider taking-up a job and over half agreed that it had motivated them to undertake more intense job search. Only around a quarter of respondents reported that participation in youth organisations had not changed these aspects substantially (a score of 3 or higher in relation to the statement that participation in youth organisations had not changed their job plans/ aspirations). The YOE survey thus suggests that involvement with youth organisations contributes to the development of resilience strategies amongst our respondents, in particular through the broadening of geographical locations where they would be willing to take-up a job and the range of occupations that they would consider.

4.3. Inequalities in the development of capitals in youth organisations and in employability outcomes

In this section we make use of binary logistic regression to explore the association of individual characteristics and type of involvement with youth organisations and the development of different types of capitals in youth organisations.

Table 5 clearly suggests that the features of the involvement in youth organisations are more strongly associated than personal characteristics with self-reported levels of development of human, social and psychological capital in youth organisations.

Table 5. Binary logistic regressions (odds ratios): high development of different forms of capital in youth organisations.

	Human capital	Social capital	Psychological capital
Individual characteristics			
Age	0.86 (0.11)	1.11 (0.18)	1.05 (0.13)
Gender	1.10 (0.17)	1.26 (0.23)	1.50*** (0.21)
Education	1.21** (0.11)	1.00 (0.11)	1.20** (0.10)
Socio-economic background	0.97 (0.05)	0.97 (0.05)	1.00 (0.04)
Occupation: student exclusively	0.68** (0.11)	0.45*** (0.09)	0.88 (0.13)
Occupation: in employment exclusively	0.92 (0.18)	1.36 (0.29)	1.18 (0.23)
Type of involvement			
Intensity of participation	1.80*** (0.25)	2.38*** (0.48)	1.34*** (0.15)
International participation (<a week)	1.50* (0.35)	1.73** (0.46)	1.15 (0.23)
International participation (>a week)	2.58*** (0.44)	1.70*** (0.35)	1.52*** (0.22)
Number of observations:	1072	1072	1048
Log likelihood	-618.3765	-483.69718	-686.42881
LR χ^2 (9)	86.86	87.48	49.60

Note: Standard errors in brackets. Source:

YOE survey.

*p < .1. **p < .05.

***p < .01.

The effect of socio-economic background is small in all models. This does not necessarily mean that actual benefits have been equal for different socio-economic groups. Young people from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds may conceptualise differently what 'high levels of development' may be or may require, a matter that deserves further investigation through qualitative work. As argued in section 3, self-awareness of the capitals developed is important, as it is likely to have an effect on the information young people present to employers in their application processes.

Age (15–19 reference category) is also of limited value predicting self-reported benefits, although there is a more noticeable increase in the development of social capital with age. The size effect of gender (male reference category) is relatively high for psychological capital only (in favour of females), but more modest for other forms of capital. The effect of level of education is positive and the size of the effect is relatively high for human capital and psychological capital, which underlines complementarities, rather than a trade-off, between non-formal education in youth organisations and formal learning. Being in employment reduces the odds of reporting benefits in the development of human capital compared to those individuals who reported more than one occupational status (reference category), which is in line with expectations; the same association does not occur for social or psychological capital. Being exclusively a student, on the other hand, reduces the development of all forms of capital. Those individuals who are exclusively students may undervalue the extent of their development of different forms of capital in youth organisations or may develop those to a lesser extent than other occupational groups, an aspect that, again, merits further research.

The size of the effects reported in Table 5 is suggestive of the importance of the characteristics of involvement with youth organisations on human, social and psychological capital development. Intensity of participation and participation in youth organisations abroad help to differentiate those individuals who report different levels of development for all forms of capital. Those individuals who 'invest' more strongly in youth organisations have much greater odds of reporting higher benefits from their involvement with these organisations. These young people may have had more time to develop their different forms of capital in youth organisations, or may have had the opportunity to reflect more on the benefits of participation than other respondents. Alternatively, those individuals who benefit the most

from involvement in youth organisations may be those who stick to them, whereas those who see less value do not become so intensively involved – although this explanation seems less plausible given that the motivations of young people to be involved in youth organisations are multifaceted and not only related to the development of different forms of capital. Those young people who go abroad also reported greater benefits, which could be expected for the development of human capital (such as language skills, flexibility, autonomy, etc.), social capital (creating new ‘weak ties’ abroad) and psychological capital (as individuals face new environments). The effect size for intensity of participation is particularly high for social capital. The effect size for longer periods abroad is particularly large in the case of the human capital variable.

4.4. From employability to employment outcomes

The influence that participation in youth organisations has on the employment outcomes of individuals may be overstated if we look only at the development of different forms of capital. In order to account for this, the survey asked those respondents who had used their involvement in youth organisations in applications for a job, internship or apprenticeship – around three quarters of the survey respondents – to report on the reaction of recruiters to this kind of experience. Almost two thirds of those young people reported that the recruiter had considered their involvement in youth organisations positively, around half that the recruiter had asked questions about it, less than a quarter that the recruiter had not mentioned anything and just under 1% that the recruiter had considered it a negative experience (multiple response possible). This suggests that participation in youth organisations has value for a large proportion of employers.

Consistently with the above message, those individuals in our sample who replied to questions on the relationship between participation in youth organisations and actual employment outcomes also offered a positive view: very often such participation was reported as an essential or contributing factor for job attainment, as shown in [Table 6](#).

Table 6. Participation in youth organisations and employment outcomes.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
I would not have my current job without my experience in youth organisations (N=)	29.90	9.44	8.04	12.41	11.89	28.32
Involvement with youth organisations helped me to obtain a job but was not a crucial factor (N=)	23.14	12.89	17.36	18.51	15.70	12.40

Key: 0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree.

Source: YOE survey

According to our respondents, participation in youth organisations not only increases employability but also aids to achieve employment.

5. Conclusions

This article has explored the degree to which young people perceive that their human, social and psychological capital is developed through involvement in youth organisations. While our sample has specific characteristics, – people with higher education and from higher socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented – the data clearly suggests that involvement in youth organisation helps to improve all these forms of capital across a full range of social and educational groups. Involvement with youth organisations helped to develop the human capital, and also to a high extent the social and psychological capital of the individuals in our sample. Over 98% of respondents reported to have improved the skills included in the survey, on average, at a level above 3 on a scale of 5. Social capital follows, with fewer than 10% of

respondents reporting that involvement in youth organisations had not helped them develop useful contacts. Finally, regarding psychological capital, around a third of respondents reported low levels of change in relation to their job plans/aspirations. Taking these results together, participation in youth organisations – the activities young people undertake in those organisations, such as workshops, training sessions, debates, administering programmes, or liaising with external stakeholders and the connections they establish – helps to significantly enhance the absolute dimension of employability amongst young people included in our sample.

Instead of asking questions about who accesses extra-curricular activities and the class-biased that arise in access (Bourdieu 1984; Ball 2003), the article has explored whether benefits from participation vary by socio-economic group. We find that the features of the involvement in youth organisations are better predictors of its results than personal characteristics, and find no strong effect of socio-economic background, measured through parental education, on the reported effects of participation for our sample. It is nevertheless the case that involvement in youth organisation remains skewed towards young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds. This suggests, first, that greater policy support would be warranted to increase opportunities for involvement of young people from lower social backgrounds in youth organisations. Moreover, greater emphasis should be placed on informing young people of the benefits of sustained involvement with youth organisations. National differences with respect to these general trends require further research. As noted by Vincent and Ball (2007) the importance of extra-curricular activities may vary according to the level of stratification of national educational systems: in countries where stratification is lower one could expect individuals to rely more on extra-curricular activities as a differentiating factor, adding a ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1984) to their profile to achieve an edge over their competitors in the labour market.

This study has relied mainly on self-assessment by young people, which is important given that young people’s perceptions of the value of involvement in youth organisations will affect how and to what extent they use such involvement in recruitment processes.

This approach could be complemented with studies that directly measure the skills of young people before and after their participation in non-formal education in youth organisations, and case-study work that unpacks the strategies through which young people are able to mobilise strategically the social and psychological capital they produce through participation in youth organisations.

Note:

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Appendix 1. Variables employed in the analysis

Name	Definition	Measurement
Age	Respondent's age at the time of the survey	15–19 = 1 20–24 = 2 25–29 = 3
Gender	Respondent's gender	Male = 1 Female = 2 Do Not wish to identify = -999
Education	Respondents' highest level of education	Primary education or lower = 0 Vocational secondary education = 1 General secondary education = 2 First stage of higher education (First Degree) = 3 Postgraduate studies = 4
Socio-economic background	Highest level of education of any parent or primary caregiver	Primary education or lower = 0 Vocational secondary education = 1 General secondary education = 2 First stage of higher education (First Degree) = 3 Postgraduate studies = 4
Occupation	Respondent's current occupation (for the logistic regression individuals were divided into those who were only students, only in employment or had mixed occupations)	Student = 1 Doing an internship/ apprenticeship = 2 Working (employed/ self-employed) = 3 Unemployed = 4 In between two study periods = 5 Other = 6

Intensity of involvement in youth organisations	Self-reported intensity of involvement in youth organisations, taking into account length (in months) of involvement and average frequency of involvement during that time	Low = Less than six months and less than once a week; six months to a year and less than twice a month; One to two years and once a year. Average = Less than six months, at least once a week; Six months to a year between twice a month and twice a week One to two years and once or twice a month Three years or more at least once a year High = Six months to a year three or more times a week One to two years at least once a week Three years or more at least once a month Yes (more than a week) = 2 Yes (less than a week) = 1 No = 0
Youth organisation involvement abroad	Respondent's self-reporting on whether has ever participated in youth activities outside home country	Yes (more than a week) = 2 Yes (less than a week) = 1 No = 0
Skills variables Communication skills, Adaptability/flexibility, Team-working skills, Intercultural skills, Self-confidence, Organisational skills, Decision-making skills, Problem solving skills, Career management skills, Leadership, Emotional intelligence, Integrity, Creativity, Entrepreneurship, Foreign language skills, Literacy and/or numeracy, IT skills	Respondents self-reporting on skills and attitudes gained or improved through involvement in youth organisations	Scale from 0 = no improvement to 5 = high improvement
Overall skills development	Computed as the sum of the scores for individual skills	Low or Medium = sum equal 69 points or below (4.0 average or below) coded as '0' High = sum equals 70 point or above (above 5.0) coded as '1'
Social capital	Respondent's self-reporting (yes/no) on the establishment of contacts through involvement in youth organisations that ...	Have already helped the respondent in employment matters Have made the respondent aware of employment opportunities Can help respondent in employment matters, but have not helped yet Are useful, but not in finding employment Are not useful
Psychological capital	Respondent's level of agreement that involvement in youth organisations ...	Has broadened the range of occupations/jobs that would consider in the future [0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree] Has broadened the range of geographical locations (cities/countries) where would consider taking-up a job [0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree] Has motivated to undertake greater/more intense job search [0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree] Has not changed job plans/aspirations [0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree]
Employment outcomes	Respondent's level of agreement that ...	Would not have current job without experience in youth organisations [0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree] Involvement in youth organisations helped to obtain job but was not a crucial factor [0 = do not agree; 5 = fully agree]